

SEPTEMBER 1997

# TreeLink News Bulletin

In the works



**Umbrella Catalpa**

*Catalpa bungei*

Typically this tree does not exceed 25' tall but can get as wide as tall. It has a very shy, rounded shape with light green lustrous leaves at maturity. Does well in high sites.

*Picture courtesy of Northwest Shade Trees*



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**

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## DNR URBAN and COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

*From mid-July on, Washington has been experiencing drier and warmer weather conditions than normal. This added stress to our community trees has put an additional burden on an already tough situation for these much needed components of the infrastructure. The previous winter ravages and the dry conditions now are an unnecessary evil that is being faced. What can we do? Water in the morning (before 9 a.m. is best) . . . water in the evening (after 9 p.m. is best) . . . water, water, water!!*

### THE POLITICS OF RISK

There are two conflicts that continuously show up in the process of implementing tree risk management. The first of these conflicts arises when a municipal vegetation manager identifies and then initiates the removal of a high-risk tree on public property, but whose decision is compromised by political pressure to keep the tree. The second occurs when a municipality or park department is ill-prepared to defend its hazard policy in court, because "reasonable care" is not defined well by staff. This issue will cover the first topic with a latter issue covering the second.

When implementing a municipal tree risk reduction program, conflict can naturally arise between the forester who is trained to identify potentially hazardous trees and the homeowner who has little or no knowledge about tree risk potential, but may have a strong emotional attachment to a tree. The conflict may escalate when the homeowner prevails upon an elected official, such as the mayor, a board member, or council person, to reverse the removal decision.

Hazard tree risk reduction policies are established to protect not only residents, but all users of the public space the tree resides in. Veering from an established risk reduction policy to avoid a short-term conflict with a homeowner destroys the basis of having the policy and can place the government agency in a difficult position to defend in court. One purpose of establishing any management policy is to guarantee a consistent response to programs, regardless of changes in administrations.

One of the challenges in implementing a tree risk management strategy is the reluctance of communities to take responsibility for the trees under their stewardship. By having trees in public areas, a community automatically accepts a certain level of risk. How a community manages risk, is a gauge of how effective an agency is at addressing difficult questions. Identifying and confronting the issues is the first major element of defining what is "reasonable care" for a community.

To initiate positive change in the risk management procedures, the following strategy should be considered:

- 1. Establish a clear hazard tree risk management policy.** This policy should be developed after carefully assessing four factors: your available budget, equipment, labor force, and the vegetation you manage. A clear policy should state the goals, the parameters in which the goals are defined, and who will administer the policy.
- 2. Have the municipality support the policy.** By having elected officials agree to the policy, they confirm that they will directly support staff's decisions to remove or keep a tree. If a homeowner wishes to discuss the removal of a tree with an elected official, the forester should feel comfortable that the elected official will support the decision.
- 3. Resolve the conflict with the homeowner.** Discuss the issues associated with hazard tree abatement with the homeowner in a professional manner. In most cases, clients react more favorably when they feel that they are being given straight information. The homeowner may have a strong personal interest in a tree which must be respected by the professional.

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